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Collaboration tops Maine Fishermen's Forum topics

By Shlomit Auciello
The Herald Gazette Reporter

ROCKPORT (March 9): Sen. Olympia Snowe and Congressman Michael Michaud were among thousands from Maine and beyond who attended the Maine Fishermen's Forum this past weekend.
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Participants came from locations throughout the coastal United States and the Canadian Maritimes to learn about current and upcoming regulations, fisheries management and equipment.



Robin Alden of the Penobscot East Resource Center describes the competition for the design of an environmentally sustainable Lean Green Lobster Boat.
 (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

From sustainable ways to survive in a period of economic change to untangling the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the 2009 Maine Fishermen's Forum was an opportunity for fishermen and those who work in related fields to learn about the tools and methods that are part of a collaboration to rebuild a fishery that has taken several severe blows in recent years.



Glen Libby of the Midcoast Fishermen's Association joins EarthJustice's Roger Fleming, the MFA's Laura Kramer and representatives of the Island Institute, PEW Environmental Group and others in describing the evolution of the Port Clyde Fresh Catch brand and marketing program. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

The Friday and Saturday sessions built on Thursday's discussions of gear design, energy efficiency and data collection to promote healthy fisheries, and reinforced the theme of transition in such workshops as "Rethinking the Lobster Business from Trap to Plate" and "New Face of a Working Waterfront." These and other sessions highlighted a growing collaboration between working fishermen and nonprofit organizations to take back control of an industry that many say has been plagued by overregulation and competition from large-scale harvesters and processors.



Kristin Bailey of the Moseley Group describes marketing strategies for lobster at Friday's session, "Rethinking the Lobster Business from Trap to Plate." (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

That theme continued in discussions of marketing and resource sharing that spread out of the large conference rooms and into the booths of the trade show as well as the educational exhibits that lined the hallways of the Samoset Resort for the three-day annual event.



Conversations about boats, equipment and innovations for the industry took place in the trade show exhibits at the Maine Fishermen's Forum. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

Saturday saw a discussion titled "Ocean Energy," which highlighted the work of the University of Maine, the Department of Marine Resources, and private industry to harvest wind and tidal energy from the Gulf of Maine.

John Ferland, director of project development for the Ocean Renewable Power Company, described the company's work off Eastport, where it is testing turbines that may ultimately produce electricity for Maine and beyond. Fishermen in the audience expressed concern about the effects of electromagnetic fields and potential exclusion zones from the company's project and ocean wind farms. The discussion of sharing the ocean in new ways continued throughout the weekend.



At Friday's "Fisheries Economic Survival 101" session, Jen Litteral of the Island Institute describes to Charlie Osborne of the Penobscot East Resource Center an experiment conducted by the Midcoast Fishermen's Association in which redesigned gear was shown to be more effective at reducing bycatch. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

Appearing in a number of sessions and exhibits was the work of the Midcoast Fishermen's Association. With assistance from the Island Institute, the association has inaugurated the nation's first community supported fishery, where products are marketed directly to households and restaurants through the purchase of seasonal shares. The program, called Port Clyde Fresh Catch, is now offering shares of shrimp and groundfish for its second summer season.

New at this year's forum was the Decompression Chamber, a room reserved for music, film viewing and more relaxed conversation. One of the highlights in the room was a duo of documentaries made by young people who have grown up around the fishing industry.



Edwin McCarron, 3, of Kennebunk learns about marine life at the forum's touch tank. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

"Life By Lobster" is a one-hour film by Emory College senior Iain McCrary-Martin of Stonington, who spent three years interviewing his peers who have remained home to fish for lobster. McCrary-Martin's film follows these young men as they make financial decisions, prepare and maintain the gear on which their lives and livelihoods depend, and experience the successes and failures of this challenging calling.

"The Fish Belong to the People" is still in production, but director Will Hyler prepared a 20-minute excerpt for the Maine Fishermen's Forum. Documenting the creation of the Port Clyde Fresh Catch Community Supported Fishery, the feature-length documentary, which is expected to be released this summer, shows how the decision by a small group of fishermen to change the way they sell their catch has impacted their lives and work and the community around them.

Workshops at the forum on data collection, ecosystem management and gear design led to conversations about effort reduction as fishermen grappled with the results of the rapid technological growth of the last half of the 20th century.



Herring fisherman Glen Lawrence of Owls Head says he plans to open Clan McLaren's, a soup and sandwich shop, on Rockland's Main Street in mid-April. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

Owls Head herring fisherman Glen Lawrence said Saturday that small-scale operations are threatened by what he referred to as "a nasty killing machine." Lawrence, who plans to open a restaurant in Rockland this spring, said large vessels such as midwater herring ships make it easy for regulators to monitor the catch, but they are making it hard for those whose families have fished for generations to survive. He echoed a consensus heard throughout the forum that technology has not always supported healthy fisheries or the industry that depends upon them.

"Gear and technology has a lot to do with where we are," said Port Clyde fisherman Randy Cushman.



Sen. Olympia Snowe, left, meets with Robin Alden at the Maine Fishermen's Forum on Friday. Maine's senior senator was at the Samoset Resort to greet those attending the forum. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)



Daryl Leach of Hamilton Marine was showing stoves to heat boats of all sizes at the Maine Fishermen's Forum trade show. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)



Fishermen and others browsed the trade show at the Maine Fishermen's Forum for tools, equipment and ideas. (Photo by Shlomit Auciello)

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